**Current State of Transportation Options for People with Disabilities**

Access to transportation continues to be a significant challenge for millions of Americans with disabilities. Even after more than three decades since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires access to public transit and a comparable paratransit system, significant barriers to transportation remain. A survey by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics carried-out in 2002 found that some 560,000 persons with disabilities in the United States never leave their home because of transportation difficulties. [https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/6337/dot\_6337\_DS1.pdf?](https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/6337/dot_6337_DS1.pdf) Additionally, a report put out by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) states that individuals with disabilities are twice as likely than persons without disabilities to have difficulties in procuring necessary and adequate transportation. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK11420/> When an individual lacks access to transportation, he or she cannot carry out essential tasks such as going to the grocery store, attending medical visits, and traveling to work each day.

Many alternative transportation options that have become widespread are inaccessible. Currently, rideshare companies like Uber and Lyft are popular forms of transportation. However, an overwhelming number of their drivers use inaccessible vehicles. Such companies only offer wheelchair vehicles in a few major cities, and, in such cities, the number of accessible vehicles are few and cause passengers to wait longer periods of time to procure a ride.

Paratransit systems also routinely fail to provide adequate transportation for persons with disabilities. Such systems are known to be unreliable and inconvenient for passengers who rely on such transportation to get to work or necessary medical appointments. For instance, some paratransit passengers are forced to ride for hours before they are finally dropped off at their destination, consuming a large fraction of their day. Also, because paratransit is only mandated in regions where a public bus system exists, persons who live in rural areas have no paratransit option. As a result, if a person with a disability wants to live where affordable, accessible transportation resources are available, he or she may be forced to move to a new city or state.

Other components of accessible transportation can be neglected. Under the law, buses are required to announce bus stop names or lower the bus for persons with physical disabilities. However, transit personnel can forget to carry out such responsibilities or the pertinent technology can be neglected and fall into disuse. Advocacy is often necessary to keep such accommodations active.

Finally, the vehicle itself is only one component of transportation; infrastructure such as sidewalks is another significant component of transportation. Many communities lack safe and accessible sidewalks and crosswalks. This hinders a person’s ability to even get to necessary locations such as bus or subway stops. As a result of such barriers, many people with disabilities are unemployed because they have no reliable source of transportation to get to a place of employment. This in turn negatively impacts the economy and increases the financial burden on the state.

**Role of the Protection and Advocacy Network**

 The Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Network promotes a society where people with disabilities exercise informed choice and self-determination. For over forty years, the P&A Network has worked to protect the human and civil rights of individuals with disabilities of any age and in any setting. The P&A Network is the largest provider of legally based advocacy services for persons with disabilities in the United States. The high number of Americans who cannot access vital transportation sources is overwhelming. Despite the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the problem has not improved in any significant way. Paratransit was developed in order to provide an alternative transit system for persons with disabilities. However, many disability and transportation advocates argue the program is antiquated and insufficient in the twenty-first Century. Advocacy is needed to bring about positive change for people with disabilities to access transportation options.

**Request for Funding**

Funding for a Transportation P&A program would support the needs and rights of children, youth, and adults with disabilities who desperately need access to transportation resources. This will in turn enable persons with disabilities to both more readily access public transportation systems and lessen the financial burden of paratransit rides, enabling persons with disabilities to go to work which will financially contribute to the economy.

While P&A agencies can already provide services to people with disabilities impacted by transportation barriers, without a dedicated source of funding to address the economic impact, financial burden, isolating consequences, and the abuse of persons’ rights that these individuals face, the ability of the P&A to advocate for this population is limited.

Dedicated funding would allow P&As to make advocacy for individuals affected by transportation barriers an absolute priority for their work, and would also allow P&As across the country the opportunity to hire staff that would specifically work on issues impacting people facing such challenges. Not being able to address these issues means that individuals that are trying to procure necessary transportation services are constantly struggling with public and private providers that fail to accommodate people with disabilities. A clear and dedicated funding stream will also allow P&As to better mitigate the health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on people impacted by transportation barriers.

P&As, through over 40 years of life-changing work, have demonstrated that they are capable of leveraging funds received for needed advocacy work into millions of dollars of critical services and supports. Dedicated funding to the P&As will allow for these benefits to accrue throughout the country, positively impacting people and all of society in a magnitude greater than the funding would suggest.

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